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CHINESE ARMOR

(Special Correspondence of THE COLLECTOR.)

WHILE China cannot compare with Europe in the beauty, richness or variety of its defensive armor, it nevertheless can show many ingenious and interesting types. The original armor of the north (Manchuria and Mongolia) seems to have been leather, and in shape more like a blouse than a jerkin. In the course of years the skin was doubled, trebled or quadrupled, and a clumsy lower garment, that might be called leather greaves and cuisses combined, was added to the upper one. The Mongolian nomads learned at a very early age that a coat or cuirass made of sheepskin in several thicknesses made a very warm garment and would turn spear, arrow or sword. Apparel of this class is in use to-day, and may be secured very cheaply in Shantung.

Parallel to this alternating of leather and wool in the north, was that of paper and cotton cloth in the south of China. It seems ridiculous to call such combinations armor, and yet they make an armor superior in many instances to steel. Thirty thicknesses of alternate calico and paper will resist a pistol bullet or one from a rifle at long range. A spearman who thrusts his weapon into a man clad in this kind of garment can neither wound his enemy nor extricate his weapon, and if the enemy is an archer or is armed with a long sword or javelin, is likely to lose his life for his mischance. The suit of a famous Yunnan bandit consisted of 60 thicknesses of cotton cloth and paper and made him practically invulnerable. These suits are comparatively light, are very durable, and of course extremely cheap. Between these extreme types lie many kinds of plate, scale and chain armor.

Plate-mail never reached a high development in the far east. I can not find that it ever passed beyond the combination of breast-plate, back-plate and shoulder-pieces. Scale-mail on the other hand was carried at an early period to high perfection. The scales were applied to cloth or leather at first, as spangles are to gauze, and later as tiles or slates are to the boards of a roof. They were composed of iron, bronze, brass, pewter, silver, gold, or of various Oriental alloys. In making a suit, scales of one kind were usually employed, but combinations were frequent in which metals of contrasting colors were used. A good suit of armor can be had of from \$10 to \$150.

Of the different pieces of armor, the helmet alone deserves attention. The Chinese artist worked along a different channel from his European colleague, and tried to make the headpiece monstrous and terrifying, rather than protective. Designs representing the jaws of serpents, griffins, and dragons are very common, but such affairs as the barred and vizored helm which Doré loves to draw are entirely unknown. Morions and skullcaps were also in general use and are to-day. The queerest type of all is the executioner's helmet. It resembles a tall mousetrap or flytrap in wire, and is painted the conventional vermilion. Centuries ago the wires were flat rods, and so arranged as to defy sword and axe, and owing to their great height disconcerted the archers of the opposite army. In the north, where wood is scarce, the helmet is made from woolen cloth, leather and metal; in the west, where there are forests, wood was frequently employed; while in the south, in addition to these four materials, cotton-cloth and paper were also used. Helmets vary in cost according to workmanship and material, and range from 20 cents to \$50.

Shields and bucklers have been in vogue from time immemorial. The favorite type is a bossed circle from two to three feet in diameter, similar to those employed by the Highlanders. Its material is leather, metal or woven split bamboo. Bamboo shields are very strong and durable. They are made of a certain variety of that vegetable, which must have attained a certain size and hardness of fibre before it is fit for this particular use. The bamboo is split into pieces an inch in width and four feet long, softened and braided in basket-work over a frame the size of the desired shield. It is dried in the sun and then in a kiln, and afterwards polished and varnished. Its high elasticity, great strength and lightness render it an admirable weapon of defense. A double thickness of bamboo, the two a half-inch apart, with a metal rim and boss, is better for the man behind it than any pavise or buckler of the Middle Ages and costs only a half-dollar.

Unlike us at home, new weapons cost more than old. Antiques can be secured for a third and a fourth of brand-new reproductions. Rich men prefer cheap imitations to originals, whether new or old, and the curio market scarcely knows armor as an object of vertu.

AMOY, July 5, 1892.

WILLIAM E. S. FALES.

Arthur Jule Goodman, whose pencil sketches have appeared in various of our weekly and monthly publications, has set up his studio in St. John's Wood, London, and is there making an exhibition of the originals of many of his works. Mr. Goodman is probably the best portrait draughtsman in lead pencil whom we have in this country. He gained his facility as a crayonist by his work under the late Matt Morgan, whose favorite pupil he was. Later he spent some years at the Paris Ecole des Beaux Arts, and he now paints agreeably in oils and water colors. His wife is a Californian, well known among us as a woman of original literary gifts and ability.

CHINESE WEAPONS

(Special Correspondence of THE COLLECTOR.)

IN weapons of war, China displays a remarkable variety. On the coast, its soldiers are armed with the latest rifle, while in the far interior they employ the same arms as were used by the vast hosts of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan. Taking the empire as a whole, the student or collector can find in use to-day every weapon that has been employed within its borders since the time of Confucius. In addition to this, the mandarins and high officials arm their retinues with conventional weapons representing different periods in the history of the nation. On account of the changes wrought by time, many of these martial instruments are so incongruous as to be positively funny. Thus, for example, the Mongolian Tartars did their fighting on horseback, and one of their most formidable arms was a pole to which was attached a hook edged on the inside. With this, they would pull a rider from his steed, wounding or killing him in the process, or would hamstring the horse at a single blow. This polehook is no longer used by the few cavalry squadrons of China, but is found carried by footmen in nearly all the retinues of the great nobles. It looks formidable, but when used by infantry against infantry would be as serviceable as an Indian club fastened securely to the end of a broomstick.

A glance at a collection of these arms shows that military uniformity was almost unknown to the Chinese generals of the past, and that the armies were made up of diverse elements, armed usually with such instruments used in peaceful pursuits as can be utilized in war. A common weapon is a trident, tined and barbed exactly as are those employed by fishermen in spearing eels, flatfish and salmon. Similar to this is a three-tined hayfork, and of equally bucolic origin is a long pole, to whose end is fastened the blade of a scythe or sickle. The European mace is suggested by a long-handled, light-headed hammer, similar to that with which Charles Martel is said to have won his quaint name. It is obvious that these four weapons are of harmless origin. The first was the favorite implement of fishermen, and the second, third and fourth, of agricultural communities.

Of the five types described, there are endless varieties. The poles are bamboo or solid wood. They are plain, carved, or decorated with mother-of-pearl, metal or cord. The heads are copper, brass, iron, pewter or steel. Sometimes they are silvered, sometimes bronzed, lacquered or gilt. Handsome ones are the exception and not the rule. The average retainer of a high official carries an arm whose pole is of the commonest wood, stained red, and whose head is of the poorest kind of cast-iron or impure pewter. Many of these ominous looking affairs would not stand a light blow, both head and pole breaking at a very slight shock.

I have never seen any lances. The deficiency is made up by a surplus of spear and halberds. Of these the designs are varied, ranging from light and efficient points and edges to grotesque and hideous shapes, that would frighten more than they would hurt. At times the workmanship is admirable. A spear captured by the French from the Black Flags in Tonquin, is eight feet long. The shaft is of iron wood, round, polished and varnished, and re-enforced here and there by wrappings of fine copper wire, and at the upper hand is encrusted for a foot with mother-of-pearl. The end is feruled with a large copper band in which is set the spear-head. This is made of fine steel six inches in length and triangular in cross-section. One face is deeply grooved so as to allow the use of a large amount of poison. These spears are used with great skill by the Chinese. Le Yu, a famous bandit, could throw one through a man at 50 yards. In the Franco-Tonquin war, a powerful Chinese foot-soldier drove his weapon entirely through two French infantrymen. It is said that the finer and handsomer spears are not of Chinese workmanship, but are made by Japanese, Korean, Anamite and Malay ironsmiths. How true this is I am unable to determine.

Of halberds there is any variety, ranging from the simple Lochaber-axe and pole-axe to the cumbrous and complicated masses of metal that were so common at the close of the Age of Chivalry. The odddest specimen was one which, instead of an axe on one side, had what seemed to be a hammer-head. It would make a noble implement for driving picture-nails in walls near to the ceiling.

In archery the Chinese have long been experts, especially those of Manchuria and Szchuen. Their bows are of three types: the long bow, which is over five feet in length, the short bow, which is about four feet long, and the cross bow. The strings are made of silk, of gut, or of a very strong home-made twine, wrapped with fine silk in the middle. Bows are graded according to their pull, the standard being 100 catties, about 135 pounds. To determine the pull the bow properly strung is suspended from the middle and weights hung to the middle of the string, until the latter is nearly an arrow's length from the bow. Famous bowmen use bows with heavier pulls, ranging from 150 to 200 pounds, and one distinguished Chinese Robin Hood is said to have drawn a 200-catty bow (about 270 pounds). The bows vary greatly in materials, construction, decoration and finish. They are made of one or several pieces of wood, and are frequently inlaid or engraved until they are a true work of art.